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T H O U G H T S

UPON THE

AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE.

By JOHN <sup>K</sup>NEWTON,

RECTOR OF ST. MARY WOOLNOTH.

MATT. vii. 12.

ALL THINGS WHATSOEVER YE WOULD THAT MEN SHOULD DO TO YOU,  
DO YE EVEN SO TO THEM; FOR THIS IS THE LAW AND THE PRO-  
PHETS.

HOMO BUM —

L O N D O N;

PRINTED FOR J. BUCKLAND, IN PATER-NOSTER-ROW; AND  
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M.DCC.LXXXVIII.

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AMERICAN SLAVE TRADE

BY JOHN W. T. M.



THE AMERICAN SLAVE TRADE  
AND THE  
MORALITY OF THE  
AMERICAN SLAVE TRADE

—

L O N D O N

PRINTED BY J. JOHNSON, ST. PAULS CHURCH-YARD, LONDON.



THOUGHTS  
UPON THE  
AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE.

THE nature and effects of that unhappy and disgraceful branch of commerce, which has long been maintained on the Coast of Africa, with the sole, and professed design of purchasing our fellow-creatures, in order to supply our West-India islands and the American colonies, when they were ours, with Slaves; is now generally understood. So much light has been thrown upon the subject, by many able pens; and so many respectable persons have already engaged to use their utmost influence, for the suppression of a traffic, which contradicts the feelings of humanity; that it is hoped, this stain of our National character will soon be wiped out.

If I attempt, after what has been done, to throw my mite into the public stock of information, it is less from an apprehension that my interference is necessary, than from a conviction, that silence, at such a time, and on such an occasion, would, in me, be criminal. If my testimony should not be necessary, or serviceable, yet, perhaps, I am bound, in conscience, to take shame to myself by a public confession, which, however sincere, comes too late to prevent, or repair, the misery and mischief to which I have, formerly, been accessory.

I hope it will always be a subject of humiliating reflection to me, that I was, once, an active instrument, in a business at which my heart now shudders. My headstrong passions and follies plunged me, in early life, into a succession of difficulties and hardships, which, at length, reduced me to seek a refuge among the Natives of Africa. There, for about the space of eighteen months, I was in effect, though without the name, a Captive and a Slave myself; and was depressed to the lowest degree of human wretchedness. Possibly, I should not have been so completely miserable, had I lived among the Natives only, but it was my lot to reside with white men; for at that time, several persons of my own colour  
and.



and language were settled upon that part of the Windward coast, which lies between Sierra-Leon and Cape Mount; for the purpose of purchasing and collecting Slaves, to sell to the vessels that arrived from Europe.

This is a bourn, from which few travellers return, who have once determined to venture upon a temporary residence there; but the good providence of God, without my expectation, and almost against my will, delivered me from those scenes of wickedness and woe; and I arrived at Liverpool in May 1748. I soon revisited the place of my captivity, as mate of a ship, and, in the year 1750, I was appointed commander, in which capacity I made three voyages to the Windward Coast, for Slaves.

I first saw the Coast of Guinea, in the year 1745, and took my last leave of it in 1754. It was not, intentionally, a farewell; but, through the mercy of God, it proved so. I fitted out for a fourth voyage, and was upon the point of sailing, when I was arrested by a sudden illness, and I resigned the ship to another Captain.

Thus I was unexpectedly freed from this disagreeable service. Disagreeable I had long

found it; but I think I should have quitted it sooner, had I considered it, as I now do, to be unlawful and wrong. But I never had a scruple upon this head, at the time; nor was such a thought once suggested to me, by any friend. What I did, I did ignorantly; considering it as the line of life which Divine Providence had allotted me, and having no concern, in point of conscience, but to treat the Slaves, while under my care, with as much humanity, as a regard to my own safety would admit.

The experience and observation of nine years, would qualify me for being a competent witness upon this subject, could I safely trust to the report of Memory, after an interval of more than thirty-three years. But, in the course of so long a period, the ideas, of past scenes and transactions, grow indistinct; and I am aware, that what I have seen, and what I have only heard related, may, by this time, have become so insensibly blended together, that, in some cases, it may be difficult for me, if not impossible, to distinguish them, with absolute certainty. It is, however, my earnest desire, and will therefore engage my utmost care, that I may offer nothing in writing, as from my own knowledge, which I could not cheerfully, if requisite, confirm upon oath.

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That part of the African shore, which lies between the river Sierra-Leon, lat. 8. 30. N. and Cape Palmas, is usually known by the name of the Windward, or Grain Coast. The extent (if my recollection does not fail me) is about one hundred and fifty leagues. There is a fort upon Benee Island, in Sierra-Leon, which formerly belonged to the old African Company: they also had a fort on an island in the river Sherbro; but the former was in private hands, and of the latter, scarcely the foundations were visible, when I first went to Africa. There is no fort, or factory, upon this coast, under the sanction of our Government; but there were, as I have said, and probably still are, private traders resident at Benee Island, at the Bananoes, and at the Plantanes. The former of these is about twelve, and the latter twenty leagues, from Sierra-Leon, to the South-East.

By these persons, the trade is carried on, in boats and shallops, thirty or forty leagues to the northward, in several rivers lying within the shoals of Rio Grande. But the most northerly place of trade, for shipping, is Sierra-Leon, and the business there, and in that neighbourhood, is chiefly transacted with the white men: but from Sherbro to Cape Palmas, directly with

the natives. Though I have been on the Gold Coast, and beyond it as far as Cape Lopez, in the latitude of one or two degrees South, I profess no knowledge of the African trade, but as it was conducted on the Windward Coast, when I was concerned in it.

I am not qualified, and if I were, I should think it rather unsuitable to my present character, as a Minister of the Gospel, to consider the African Slave Trade, merely, in a political light. This disquisition more properly belongs to persons in civil life. Only thus far, my character as a Minister will allow, and perhaps require me, to observe; that the best Human Policy, is that, which is connected with a reverential regard to Almighty God, the Supreme Governor of the Earth. Every plan, which aims at the welfare of a nation, in defiance of his authority and laws, however apparently wise, will prove to be essentially defective, and, if persisted in, ruinous. The Righteous Lord loveth Righteousness, and He has engaged to plead the cause, and vindicate the wrongs, of the oppressed. It is Righteousness that exalteth a nation; and Wickedness is the present reproach, and will, sooner or later, unless repentance intervene, prove the ruin of any people.

Perhaps



Perhaps what I have said of myself, may be applicable to the nation at large. The Slave Trade was always unjustifiable; but inattention and interest prevented, for a time, the evil from being perceived. It is otherwise at present; the mischiefs and evils, connected with it, have been, of late years, represented with such undeniable evidence, and are now so generally known, that I suppose there is hardly an objection can be made, to the wish of thousands, perhaps of millions, for the suppression of this Trade, but upon the ground of political expedience.

Though I were even sure, that a principal branch of the public revenue depended upon the African Trade, (which, I apprehend, is far from being the case,) if I had access and influence, I should think myself bound to say to Government, to Parliament, and to the Nation, "It is not lawful to put it into the Treasury, because it is the price of blood\*."

I account an intelligent Farmer to be a good Politician, in this sense; that, if he has a large heap of good corn, he will not put a small quantity, that is damaged, to the rest, for the sake of encreasing the heap. He knows

\* Matt. xxvii. 6,

that such an addition would spoil the whole. God forbid, that any supposed profit or advantage, which we can derive from the groans and agonies, and blood of the poor Africans, should draw down his heavy curse, upon all that we might, otherwise, honourably and comfortably possess.

For the sake of Method, I could wish to consider the African Trade,—First, with regard to the effects it has upon our own people; and Secondly, as it concerns the Blacks, or, as they *are* more contemptuously styled, the Negroe Slaves, whom we purchase upon the Coast. But these two topics, are so interwoven together, that it will not be easy to keep them exactly separate.

1. The first point I shall mention is surely of political importance, if the lives of our fellow-subjects be so; and if a rapid loss of Seamen deserves the attention of a maritime people. This loss, in the African Trade, is truly alarming. I admit, that many of them are cut off in their first voyage, and, consequently, before they can properly rank as Seamen; though they would have been Seamen, if they had lived. But the neighbourhood of our sea-ports is continually drained, of men and boys, to supply the places of those who  
die



die abroad, and if they are not all Seamen, they are all our brethren and countrymen, subjects of the British Government.

The people who remain, on ship-board, upon the open coast, if not accustomed to the climate, are liable to the attack of an inflammatory fever, which is not often fatal, unless the concurrence of unfavourable circumstances makes it so. When this danger is over, I think, they might, probably, be as healthy as in most other voyages: provided, they could be kept from sleeping in the dews, from being much exposed to the rain, from the intemperate use of spirits, and especially from women.

But, considering the general disposition of our Sailors, and the nature of the Slave Trade, these provisos are of little more significance, than if I should say, upon another occasion, that Great-Britain would be a happy country, *provided*, all the inhabitants were Wise, and Good. The Sailors *must* be much exposed to the weather; especially on the Windward Coast, where a great part of the cargo is procured by boats, which are often sent to the distance of thirty or forty leagues, and are sometimes a month before they return. Many vessels arrive upon the coast, before the rainy  
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season, which continues from about May to October, is over; and if trade be scarce, the ships which arrive in the fair, or dry season, often remain till the rains return, before they can complete their purchase. A proper shelter from the weather, in an open boat, when the rain is incessant night and day, for weeks and months, is impracticable.

I have myself, in such a boat, been five or six days together, without, as we say, a dry thread about me, sleeping or waking. And during the fair season, Tornadoes, or violent storms of wind, thunder, and heavy rain, are very frequent, though they seldom last long. In fact, the boats seldom return, without bringing some of the people ill of dangerous fevers or fluxes, occasioned either by the weather, or by unwholesome diet, such as the crude fruits and palm wine, with which they are plentifully supplied by the natives.

Strong liquors, such as brandy, rum, or English spirits, the Sailors cannot often procure, in such quantities as to hurt them; but they will, if they can; and opportunities sometimes offer, especially to those who are in the boats; for strong liquor being an article much in demand, so that, without it, scarcely a single Slave can be purchased, it is always at hand.



hand. And if what is taken from the casks or bottles, that are for sale, be supplied with water, they are as full as they were before. The Blacks, who buy the liquor, are the losers by the adulteration; but often the people, who cheat them, are the greatest sufferers.

The article of Women, likewise, contributes largely to the loss of our Seamen. When they are on shore, they often, from their known, thoughtless imprudence, involve themselves, on this account, in quarrels with the Natives, and, if not killed upon the spot, are frequently poisoned. On ship-board, they may be restrained, and in some ships they are; but such restraint is far from being general. It depends much upon the disposition, and attention, of the Captain. When I was in the trade, I knew several commanders of African ships, who were prudent, respectable men, and who maintained a proper discipline and regularity in their vessels; but there were too many of a different character. In some ships, perhaps in the most, the license allowed, in this particular, was almost unlimited. Moral turpitude was seldom considered, but they who took care to do the ship's business, might, in other respects, do what they pleased. These excesses, if they do not induce fevers, at least, render the

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constitution

constitution less able to support them; and lewdness, too frequently, terminates in death.

The risk of insurrections is to be added. These, I believe, are always meditated; for the Men Slaves are not, easily, reconciled to their confinement, and treatment; and if attempted, they are seldom suppressed without considerable loss; and sometimes they succeed, to the destruction of a whole ship's company at once. Seldom a year passes, but we hear of one or more such catastrophes: and we likewise hear, sometimes, of Whites and Blacks involved, in one moment, in one common ruin, by the gunpowder taking fire, and blowing up the ship.

How far the several causes, I have enumerated, may respectively operate, I cannot say: the fact however is sure, that a great number of our Seamen perish in the Slave Trade. Few ships, comparatively, are either blown up, or totally cut off, but some are. Of the rest, I have known some that have lost half their people, and some a larger proportion. I am far from saying, that it is always, or even often, thus; but, I believe, I shall state the matter sufficiently low, if I suppose, that, at least, one fifth part of those who go from England to the Coast of Africa, in ships which

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trade



trade for Slaves, never return from thence. I dare not depend, too much, upon my memory, as to the number of ships, and men, employed in the Slave Trade more than thirty years ago; nor do I know what has been the state of the trade since; therefore I shall not attempt to make calculations. But, as I cannot but form some opinion upon th subject, I judge it probable, that the collective sum of Seamen, who go, from all our ports, to Africa, within the course of a year, (taking Guinea in the extensive sense, from Goree or Gambia, and including the coast of Angola,) cannot be less than eight thousand; and if, upon an average of ships and seasons, a fifth part of these die, the annual loss is fifteen hundred. I believe those, who have taken pains to make more exact enquiries, will deem my supposition to be very moderate.

Thus much concerning the first evil, the Loss of Seamen and Subjects, which the nation sustains, by the African Slave Trade.

2. There is a second, which either is, or ought to be, deemed of importance, considered in a political light. I mean, the dreadful effects of this trade, upon the minds of those who are engaged in it. There are, doubtless, exceptions, and I would, willingly, except myself.

myself. But, in general, I know of no method of getting money, not even that of robbery, for it, upon the highway, which has a more direct tendency to efface the moral sense, to rob the heart of every gentle and humane disposition, and to harden it, like steel, against all impressions of sensibility.

Usually, about two-thirds of a cargo of Slaves are males. When a hundred and fifty or two hundred stout men, torn from their native land, many of whom never saw the sea, much less a ship, till a short space before they are embarked; who have, probably, the same natural prejudice against a white man, as we have against a black; and who often bring with them an apprehension that they are bought to be eaten: I say, when thus circumstanced, it is not to be expected that they will, tamely, resign themselves to their situation. It is always taken for granted, that they will attempt to gain their liberty, if possible. Accordingly, as we dare not trust them, we receive them on board, from the first, as enemies: and before their number exceeds, perhaps, ten or fifteen, they are all put in irons; in most ships, two and two together. And frequently, they are not thus confined, as they might, most conveniently, stand or move, the right hand and foot of one to the left of the other; but across, that



that is, the hand and foot of each on the same side, whether right or left, are fettered together: so that they cannot move, either hand or foot, but with great caution, and with perfect consent. Thus they must sit, walk and lie, for many months, (sometimes for nine or ten,) without any mitigation or relief, unless they are sick.

In the night they are confined below, in the day-time (if the weather be fine) they are upon deck; and as they are brought up, by pairs, a chain is put through a ring upon their irons, and this is likewise locked down to the ring-bolts, which are fastened at certain intervals upon the deck. These, and other precautions, are no more than necessary; especially, as while the number of Slaves increases, that of the people, who are to guard them, is diminished, by sickness, or death, or by being absent in the boats: so that, sometimes, not ten men can be mustered, to watch, night and day, over two hundred, besides having all the other business of the ship to attend.

That these precautions are so often effectual, is much more to be wondered at, than that they sometimes fail. One unguarded hour, or minute, is sufficient to give the Slaves the oppor-

opportunity they are always waiting for. An attempt to rise upon the ship's company, brings on instantaneous and horrid war; for, when they are once in motion, they are desperate; and where they do not conquer, they are seldom quelled without much mischief and blood-shed, on both sides.

Sometimes, when the Slaves are ripe for an insurrection, one of them will impeach the affair; and then necessity, and the state policy, of these small, but most absolute governments, enforce maxims directly contrary to the nature of things. The traitor to the cause of liberty is caressed, rewarded, and deemed an honest fellow. The patriots, who formed and animated the plan, if they can be found out, must be treated as villains, and punished, to intimidate the rest. These punishments, in their nature and degree, depend upon the sovereign will of the Captain. Some are content with inflicting such moderate punishment, as may suffice for an example. But unlimited power, instigated by revenge, and where the heart, by a long familiarity with the sufferings of Slaves, is become callous, and insensible to the pleadings of humanity, is terrible.

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I have seen them sentenced to unmerciful whippings, continued till the poor creatures have not had power to groan under their misery, and hardly a sign of life has remained. I have seen them agonizing for hours, I believe, for days together, under the torture of the thumb-screws; a dreadful engine, which, if the screw be turned by an unrelenting hand, can give intolerable anguish. There have been instances in which cruelty has proceeded still further; but, as I hope they are few, and I can mention but one, from my own knowledge, I shall but mention it.

I have often heard a Captain, who has been long since dead, boast of his conduct in a former voyage, when his Slaves attempted to rise upon him. After he had suppressed the insurrection, he sat in judgment upon the insurgents; and not only, in cold blood, adjudged several of them, I know not how many, to die, but studied, with no small attention, how to make death as excruciating to them as possible. For my reader's sake, I suppress the recital of particulars.

Surely, it must be allowed, that they who are long conversant with such scenes as these, are liable to imbibe a spirit of ferociousness,

and savage insensibility, of which human nature, depraved as it is, is not, ordinarily, capable. If these things be true, the reader will admit the possibility of a fact, that was in current report, when I was upon the coast, and the truth of which, though I cannot now authenticate it, I have no reason to doubt.

A Mate of a ship, in a long-boat, purchased a young woman, with a fine child, of about a year old, in her arms. In the night, the child cried much, and disturbed his sleep. He rose up in great anger, and swore, that if the child did not cease making such a noise, he would presently silence it. The child continued to cry. At length he rose up a second time, tore the child from the mother, and threw it into the sea. The child was soon silenced indeed, but it was not so easy to pacify the woman: she was too valuable to be thrown overboard, and he was obliged to bear the sound of her lamentations, till he could put her on board his ship.

I am persuaded, that every tender mother, who casts her eyes and her mind, when she contemplates the infant in her arms, will commiserate the poor Africans.—But why do I speak of one child, when we have heard and  
read



read a melancholy story, too notoriously true to admit of contradiction, of more than a hundred grown slaves, thrown into the sea, at one time, from on board a ship, when fresh water was scarce; to fix the loss upon the Underwriters, which otherwise, had they died on board, must have fallen upon the Owners of the vessel. These instances are specimens of the spirit produced, by the African Trade, in men, who, once, were no more destitute of the milk of human kindness, than ourselves.

Hitherto, I have considered the condition of the Men Slaves only. From the Women, there is no danger of insurrection, and they are carefully kept from the men; I mean, from the Black men. But——In what I have to offer, on this head, I am far from including every ship. I speak not of what is universally, but of what is too commonly, and, I am afraid, too generally, prevalent.

I have already observed, that the Captain of an African ship, while upon the coast, is absolute in his command; and if he be humane, vigilant, and determined, he has it in his power to protect the miserable; for scarcely any thing can be done, on board the ship,

without his permission, or connivance. But this power is, too seldom, exerted in favour of the poor Women Slaves.

When we hear of a town taken by storm, and given up to the ravages of an enraged and licentious army, of wild and unprincipled Cossacks, perhaps no part of the distress affects a feeling mind more, than the treatment to which the Women are exposed. But the enormities frequently committed, in an African ship, though equally flagrant, are little known *here*, and are considered, *there*, only as matters of course. When the Women and Girls are taken on board a ship, naked, trembling, terrified, perhaps almost exhausted with cold, fatigue and hunger, they are often exposed to the wanton rudeness of white Savages. The poor creatures cannot understand the language they hear, but the looks and manner of the speakers, are sufficiently intelligible. In imagination, the prey is divided, upon the spot, and only reserved till opportunity offers. Where resistance, or refusal, would be utterly in vain, even the solicitation of consent is seldom thought of. But I forbear.—This is not a subject for declamation. Facts like these, so certain, and so numerous, speak for themselves. Surely, if the advocates for  
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the Slave Trade attempt to plead for it, before the Wives and Daughters of our happy land, or before those who have Wives or Daughters of their own, they must lose their cause.

Perhaps some hard-hearted pleader may suggest, that such treatment would indeed be cruel, in Europe; but the African Women are Negroes, Savages, who have no idea of the nicer sensations which obtain among civilized people. I dare contradict them in the strongest terms. I have lived long, and conversed much, amongst these supposed Savages. I have often slept in their towns, in a house filled with goods for trade, with no person in the house but myself, and with no other door than a mat; in that security, which no man in his senses would expect, in this civilized nation, especially in this metropolis, without the precaution of having strong doors, strongly locked and bolted. And with regard to the women, in Sherbro, where I was most acquainted, I have seen many instances of modesty, and even delicacy, which would not disgrace an English woman. Yet, such is the treatment which I have known permitted, if not encouraged, in many of our ships—they have been abandoned, without restraint,

restraint, to the lawless will of the first comer.

Accustomed thus to despise, insult, and injure the Slaves on board, it may be expected that the conduct of many of our people to the Natives, with whom they trade, is, as far as circumstances admit, very similar; and it is so. They are considered as a people to be robbed and spoiled, with impunity. Every art is employed to deceive, and wrong them. And he who has most address, in this way, has most to boast of.

Not an article, that is capable of diminution or adulteration, is delivered genuine, or entire. The spirits are lowered by water. False heads are put into the kegs that contain the gunpowder; so that, though the keg appears large, there is no more powder in it, than in a much smaller. The linen and cotton cloths are opened, and two or three yards, according to the length of the piece, cut off, not from the end, but out of the middle, where it is not so readily noticed.

The Natives are cheated, in the number, weight, measure, or quality, of what they purchase,



purchase, in every possible way. And, by habit and emulation, a marvellous dexterity is acquired in these practices. And thus the Natives, in their turn, in proportion to their commerce with the Europeans, and (I am sorry to add) particularly with the English, become jealous, insidious and revengeful.

They know with whom they deal, and are accordingly prepared;—though they can trust some ships and boats, which have treated them with punctuality, and may be trusted by them. A quarrel, sometimes, furnishes pretext for detaining, and carrying away, one or more of the Natives, which is retaliated, if practicable, upon the next boat that comes to the place, from the same port. For so far their vindictive temper is restrained by their ideas of justice, that they will not, often, revenge an injury received from a Liverpool ship, upon one belonging to Bristol or London.

They will, usually, wait with patience, the arrival of one, which, they suppose, by her sailing from the same place, has some connection with that which used them ill; and they are so quick at distinguishing our little local differences of language, and customs in a ship, that before they have been in a ship five minutes,

nutes, and often before they come on board, they know, with certainty, whether she be from Bristol, Liverpool, or London.

Retaliation on their parts, furnishes a plea for reprisal on ours. Thus, in one place or another, trade is often suspended, all intercourse cut off, and things are in a state of war; till necessity, either on the ship's part, or on theirs, produces overtures of peace, and dictates the price, which the offending party must pay for it. But it is a warlike peace. We trade under arms; and they are furnished with long knives.

For, with a few exceptions, the English and the Africans, reciprocally, consider each other as consummate villains, who are always watching opportunities to do mischief. In short, we have, I fear too deservedly, a very unfavourable character upon the Coast. When I have charged a Black with unfairness and dishonesty, he has answered, if able to clear himself, with an air of disdain, "What! do you think I am a White Man?"

Such is the nature, such are the concomitants, of the Slave Trade; and such is the school in which many thousands of our Seamen



are brought up. Can we then wonder at that impatience of subordination, and that disposition to mutiny, amongst them, which has been, of late, so loudly complained of, and so severely felt? Will not sound policy suggest, the necessity, of some expedient here? Or can sound policy suggest any, effectual, expedient, but the total suppression of a Trade, which, like a poisonous root, diffuses its malignity into every branch?

The effects which our trade has upon the Blacks, those especially who come under our power, may be considered under three heads, — How they are acquired? The mortality they are subject to, and, How those who survive are disposed of? I confine my remarks on the first head to the Windward Coast, and can speak most confidently of the trade in Sherbro, where I lived. I own, however, that I question, if any part of the Windward Coast is equal to Sherbro, in point of regularity and government. They have no men of great power or property among them; as I am told there are upon the Gold Coast, at Whidah and Benin. The Sherbro people live much in the patriarchal way. An old man usually presides in each town,

town, whose authority depends more on his years, than on his possessions: and He, who is called the King, is not easily distinguished, either by state or wealth, from the rest. But the different districts, which seem to be, in many respects, independent of each other, are incorporated, and united, by means of an institution which pervades them all, and is called The *Purrow*. The persons of this order, who are very numerous, seem, very much, to resemble the Druids, who once presided in our island.

The *Purrow* has both the legislative and executive authority, and, under their sanction, there is a police exercised, which is by no means contemptible. Every thing belonging to the *Purrow* is mysterious and severe, but, upon the whole, it has very good effects; and as any man, whether bond or free, who will submit to be initiated into their mysteries, may be admitted of the Order, it is a kind of Common-wealth. And, perhaps, few people enjoy more, simple, political freedom, than the inhabitants of Sherbro, belonging to the *Purrow*, (who are not slaves,) further than they are bound by their own institutions. Private property is tolerably well secured, and violence is much suppressed.

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The state of Slavery, among these wild barbarous people, as we esteem them, is much milder than in our colonies. For as, on the one hand, they have no land in high cultivation, like our West-India plantations, and therefore no call for that excessive, unintermitted labour, which exhausts our Slaves; so, on the other hand, no man is permitted to draw blood, even from a Slave. If he does, he is liable to a strict inquisition; for the *Purrow* laws will not allow a private individual to shed blood. A man may sell his slave, if he pleases; but he may not wantonly abuse him. The laws likewise punish some species of theft, with slavery; and in cases of adultery, which are very common, as polygamy is the custom of the country, both the woman, and the man who offends with her, are liable to be sold for Slaves, unless they can satisfy the husband, or unless they are redeemed by their friends.

Among these unenlightened Blacks, it is a general maxim, that if a man steals, or breaks a moveable, as a musket, for instance, the offence may be nearly compensated, by putting another musket in its place; but offences, which cannot be repaired in kind, as adultery, admit of no satisfaction, till the injured person

declares, that He is satisfied. So that, if a rich man seduces the wife of a poor man, he has it in his power to change places with him; for he may send for every article in his house, one by one, till he says, "I have enough." The only alternative, is personal slavery.

I suppose, bribery and influence may have their effects in Guinea, as they have in some other countries; but their laws, in the main, are wise and good, and, upon the whole, they have considerable operation; and therefore, I believe, many of the Slaves purchased in Sherbro, and probably upon the whole Windward Coast, are convicts, who have forfeited their liberty, by breaking the laws of their country.

But, I apprehend, that the neighbourhood of our ships, and the desire of our goods, are motives, which often push the rigor of the laws to an extreme, which would not be exacted, if they were left to themselves.

But Slaves are the staple article of the traffic; and though a considerable number may have been born near the sea, I believe the bulk of them are brought from far. I have reason to think, that some travel more than a thousand miles,



miles, before they reach the sea-coast. Whether there may be convicts amongst these likewise, or what proportion they may bear to those who are taken prisoners in war, it is impossible to know.

I judge, the principal source of the Slave Trade, is, the wars which prevail among the Natives. Sometimes, these wars break out between those who live near the sea. The English, and other Europeans, have been charged with fomenting them; I believe (so far as concerns the Windward Coast) unjustly. That some would do it, if they could, I doubt not; but I do not think they can have opportunity. Nor is it needful they should interfere. Thousands, in our own country, wish for war, because they fatten upon its spoils.

Human nature is much the same in every place, and few people will be willing to allow, that the *Negroes* in Africa are better than themselves. Supposing, therefore, they wish for European goods, may not they wish to purchase them from a ship just arrived? Of course, they must wish for Slaves to go to market with; and if they have not Slaves, and think themselves strong enough to invade their

their neighbours, they will probably wish for war.—And if once they wish for it, how easy is it to find, or make, prettexts for breaking an inconvenient peace; or (after the example of greater heroes, of Christian name) to make depredations, without condescending to assign any reasons.

I verily believe, that the far greater part of the wars, in Africa, would cease; if the Europeans would cease to tempt them, by offering goods for Slaves. And though they do not bring legions into the field, their wars are bloody. I believe, the captives reserved for sale, are fewer than the slain.

I have not sufficient data to warrant calculation, but, I suppose, not less than one hundred thousand Slaves are exported, annually, from all parts of Africa, and that more than one half, of these, are exported in English bottoms.

If but an equal number are killed in war, and if many of these wars are kindled by the incentive of selling their prisoners; what an annual accumulation of blood must there be, crying against the nations of Europe concerned in this trade, and particularly against our own!

I have,



I have, often, been gravely told, as a proof that the Africans, however hardly treated, deserve but little compassion, that they are a people so destitute of natural affection, that it is common, among them, for parents to sell their children, and children their parents. And, I think, a charge, of this kind, is brought against them, by the respectable author of *Spectacle de la Nature*. But he must have been misinformed. I never heard of one instance of either, while I used the Coast.

One article more, upon this head, is Kidnapping, or stealing free people. Some people suppose, that the Ship Trade is rather the stealing, than the buying of Slaves. But there is enough to lay to the charge of the ships, without accusing them falsely. The slaves, in general, are bought, and paid for. Sometimes, when goods are lent, or trusted on shore, the trader voluntarily leaves a free person, perhaps his own son, as a hostage, or pawn, for the payment; and, in case of default, the hostage is carried off, and sold; which, however hard upon him, being in consequence of a free stipulation, cannot be deemed unfair. There have been instances of unprincipled Captains, who, at the close of what they supposed their last voyage, and when

when they had no intention of revisiting the Coast, have detained, and carried away, free people with them; and left the next ship, that should come from the same port, to risk the consequences. But these actions, I hope, and believe, are not common.

With regard to the Natives, to steal a free man or woman, and to sell them on board a ship, would, I think, be a more difficult, and more dangerous attempt, in Sherbro, than in London. But I have no doubt, that the traders who come, from the interior parts of Africa, at a great distance, find opportunity, in the course of their journey, to pick up stragglers, whom they may meet in their way. This branch of oppression, and robbery, would likewise fail, if the temptation to it were removed.

I have, to the best of my knowledge, pointed out the principal sources, of that immense supply of Slaves, which furnishes so large an exportation every year. If all that are taken on board the ships, were to survive the voyage, and be landed in good order, possibly the English, French, and Dutch islands, and colonies, would be soon overstocked, and fewer ships would sail to the Coast. But a larger



large abatement must be made for mortality. —After what I have already said of their treatment, I shall now, that I am again to consider them on board the ships, confine myself to this point.

In the Portuguese ships, which trade from Brasil to the Gold Coast and Angola, I believe, a heavy mortality is not frequent. The Slaves have room, they are not put in irons, (I speak from information only,) and are humanely treated.

With our ships, the great object is, to be full. When the ship is there, it is thought desirable, she should take as many as possible. The cargo of a vessel of a hundred tons, or little more, is calculated to purchase from two hundred and twenty to two hundred and fifty Slaves. Their lodging-rooms below the deck, which are three, (for the men, the boys, and the women,) besides a place for the sick, are sometimes more than five feet high, and sometimes less; and this height is divided towards the middle, for the Slaves lie in two rows, one above the other, on each side of the ship, close to each other, like books upon a shelf. I have known them so close,

F

that

that the shelf would not, easily, contain one more,

And I have known a white man sent down, among the men, to lay them in these rows to the greatest advantage, so that as little space as possible might be lost. Let it be observed, that the poor creatures, thus cramped for want of room, are likewise in irons, for the most part both hands and feet, and two together, which makes it difficult for them to turn or move, to attempt either to rise or to lie down, without hurting themselves, or each other. Nor is the motion of the ship, especially her heeling, or stoop on one side, when under sail, to be omitted; for this, as they lie athwart, or across the ship, adds to the uncomfortableness of their lodging, especially to those who lie on the leeward, or leaning, side of the vessel.

Dire is the tossing, deep the groans.—

The heat and the smell of these rooms, when the weather will not admit of the Slaves being brought upon deck, and of having their rooms cleaned every day, would be, almost, insupportable, to a person not accus-



tomed to them. If the Slaves and their rooms can be constantly aired, and they are not detained too long on board, perhaps there are not many die; but the contrary is often their lot. They are kept down, by the weather, to breathe a hot and corrupted air, sometimes for a week: this, added to the galling of their irons, and the despondency which seizes their spirits, when thus confined, soon becomes fatal. And every morning, perhaps, more instances than one are found, of the living and the dead, like the Captives of Mezentius, fastened together.

Epidemical fevers and fluxes, which fill the ship with noisome and noxious effluvia, often break out, infect the Seamen likewise, and the Oppressors, and the Oppressed, fall by the same stroke. I believe, nearly one half of the Slaves on board, have, sometimes, died; and that the loss of a third part, in these circumstances, is not unusual. The ship, in which I was Mate, left the Coast with Two Hundred and Eighteen Slaves on board; and though we were not much affected by epidemical disorders, I find, by my journal of that voyage, (now before me,) that we buried Sixty-two on our passage to South-Carolina,

exclusive of those which died before we left the Coast, of which I have no account.

I believe, upon an average between the more healthy, and the more sickly voyages, and including all contingencies, One Fourth of the whole purchase may be allotted to the article of Mortality. That is, if the English ships purchase *Sixty Thousand* Slaves annually, upon the whole extent of the Coast, the annual loss of lives cannot be much less than *Fifteen Thousand*.

I am now to speak of the survivors.—When the ships make the land, (usually the West-India islands,) and have their port in view, after having been four, five, six weeks, or a longer time, at sea, (which depends much upon the time that passes before they can get into the permanent Trade Winds, which blow from the North-East and East across the Atlantic,) then, and not before, they venture to release the Men Slaves from their irons. And then, the sight of the land, and their freedom from long and painful confinement, usually excite in them a degree of alacrity, and a transient feeling of joy—

The prisoner leaps to lose his chains.

But,



But, this joy is short-lived indeed. The condition of the unhappy Slaves is in a continual progress from bad to worse. Their case is truly pitiable, from the moment they are in a state of slavery, in their own country; but it may be deemed a state of ease and liberty, compared with their situation on board our ships.

Yet, perhaps, they would wish to spend the remainder of their days on ship-board, could they know, before-hand, the nature of the servitude which awaits them, on shore; and that the dreadful hardships and sufferings they have already endured, would, to the most of them, only terminate in excessive toil, hunger, and the excruciating tortures of the eart-whip, inflicted at the caprice of an unfeeling Overseer, proud of the power allowed him of punishing whom, and when, and how he pleases.

I hope the Slaves, in our islands, are better treated now, than they were, at the time when I was in the trade. And even then, I know, there were Slaves, who, under the care and protection of humane masters, were, comparatively, happy. But I saw and heard enough

enough to satisfy me, that their condition, in general, was wretched to the extreme. However, my stay in Antigua and St. Christopher's (the only islands I visited) was too short, to qualify me for saying much, from my own certain knowledge, upon this painful subject. Nor is it needful:—Enough has been offered by several respectable writers, who have had opportunity of collecting surer, and fuller information.

One thing I cannot omit, which was told me by the Gentleman to whom my ship was consigned, at Antigua, in the year 1751, and who was, himself, a Planter. He said, that calculations had been made, with all possible exactness, to determine which was the preferable, that is, the more saving method of managing Slaves:—

“Whether, to appoint them moderate  
“work, plenty of provision, and such  
“treatment, as might enable them to  
“protract their lives to old age?” Or,

1 “By rigorously straining their strength to  
“the utmost, with little relaxation,  
“hard fare, and hard usage, to wear  
“them out before they became useless,  
“and



“and unable to do service; and then,  
 “to buy new ones, to fill up their  
 “places?”

He farther said, that these skilful calculators had determined in favour of the latter mode, as much the cheaper; and that he could mention several estates, in the island of Antigua, on which, it was seldom known, that a Slave had lived above nine years.

*Ex pede Herculem!*

When the Slaves are landed for sale, (for in the Leeward Islands they are usually sold on shore,) it may happen, that after a long separation in different parts of the ship, when they are brought together in one place, some, who are nearly related, may recognize each other. If, upon such a meeting, pleasure should be felt, it can be but momentary. The sale disperses them wide, to different parts of the island, or to different islands. Husbands and Wives, Parents and Children, Brothers and Sisters, must suddenly part again, probably to meet no more.

After a careful perusal of what I have written, weighing every paragraph distinctly,

I have

I can

I can find nothing to retract. As it is not easy to write altogether with coolness, upon this business, and especially not easy to me, who have formerly been so deeply engaged in it; I have been jealous, lest the warmth of imagination might have insensibly seduced me, to aggravate and overcharge some of the horrid features, which I have attempted to delineate, of the African Trade. But, upon a strict review, I am satisfied.

I have apprized the reader, that I write from memory, after an interval of more than thirty years. But at the same time, I believe, many things which I saw, heard and felt, upon the Coast of Africa, are so deeply engraven in my memory, that I can hardly forget, or greatly mistake them, while I am capable of remembering any thing. I am certainly not guilty of wilful misrepresentation. And, upon the whole, I dare appeal to the Great Searcher of hearts, in whose presence I write, and before whom I, and my readers, must all shortly appear, that (with the restrictions and exceptions I have made) I have advanced nothing, but what, to the best of my judgment and conscience, is true.

I have



I have likewise written without sollicitation, and simply from the motive I have already assigned; a conviction, that the share I have formerly had in the trade, binds me, in conscience, to throw what light I am able upon the subject, now it is likely to become a point of Parliamentary investigation.

No one can have less interest in it, than I have at present, further than as I am interested by the feelings of humanity, and a regard for the honor, and welfare of my country.

Though unwilling to give offence to a single person: in such a cause, I ought not to be afraid of offending many, by declaring the truth. If, indeed, there can be many, whom even interest can prevail upon to contradict the common sense of mankind, by pleading for a commerce, so iniquitous, so cruel, so oppressive, so destructive, as the African Slave Trade!

F I N I S.

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